

Batshaw wins excellence award

Batshaw Youth and Family Centres has received an Award of Excellence from the Association des centres jeunesse du Québec. The agency won this special recognition for an innovative prevention project it introduced, with local partners, for Black families in LaSalle. Given its outstanding success, the idea may well be adopted by other communities.

The LaSalle project was set up as a pilot in 2004 by Batshaw, the local CLSC and the LaSalle Boys and Girls Club. Their goal was to prevent more Black youth in that community from coming under the youth protection system. “LaSalle had the largest number of children being reported to child protection as being abused or neglected,” explains **Howard Nadler**, Batshaw’s manager, Liaison with Network Partners. “Something had to be done to change that picture.”

The partners took aim at some of the root causes of a dire situation with a comprehensive program of family support and conflict mediation. Intensive home-based support services for the families included assistance with parent/child conflict; with child behaviour management, at home and in school; individual counselling; and learning issues. A system of providing referrals to available community services was set up, which marked a greater collaboration between social service providers in meeting Black families’ needs.

“We were all thrilled with the results,” exclaims Nadler. “Sixty-four families, with a total of 97 children, participated in the project. Before our intervention, all these kids would have been referred to youth protection. But with the cooperation of the families, and the services we offered, only nine of those children required youth protection services.

“Feedback from both the families and their kids has been very, very positive,” Nadler affirms. “We’re hoping now that there will be more funding to keep the effort going.” For further information: 514 989 1885, ext. 1185.

SAP spiffs up schoolrooms

Students at the Montreal Oral School for the Deaf got a good look at corporate volunteerism one day in November. Seventy-five employees of SAP Canada, an international business software provider, completely renovated four classrooms used by the School in nearby Westmount Park School. They donated materials and some 600 work-hours to painting, carpeting and installing shelving and storage space for the children housed at that site.

“These are classrooms used for teaching 30 students from kindergarten to grade 6,” explains **Martha Perusse**, School principal. “They are in a very old building near our main school, and were somewhat the worse for wear until SAP came along. The children were amazed at the transformation, and very much impressed with seeing volunteerism in action. They created a ‘thank you’ book for the people who did all that work for them.”

The Montreal Oral School for the Deaf was founded in the ‘50s by parents who wanted their deaf children to talk and attend regular schools. The School has since become a leader in auditory-oral education, and a pioneer in developing parent-infant and preschool programs for deaf children. Up to 60 percent of its students have been fully integrated into local schools. For further information: 514 488 4946.

SAP is a member of Volunteer Canada’s Corporate Council on Volunteering.

Major charity effort for mental health

A new national mental health charity has just been established to develop leading research and demonstration projects in the field of mental health, mental illness and brain injury. Mental Health Partnerships of Canada, a new body created by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, has joined with the Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation to launch the venture. Their goal is to harness a national army of volunteers to fund-raise on a scale with such charities as cancer and heart and stroke.

McGill wooing aboriginal students

McGill's School of Social Work has been making some significant headway in its goal of attracting aboriginal students by adapting its curriculum and providing them with special support on campus. The School is also exploring the possibilities of providing degree level courses in the North.

"Coming to the city is quite a challenge for most native people who want to study," says **Wendy Thomson**, School director. "For others it just isn't an option. So we're taking a two-pronged approach to educating native social workers to serve in their own communities."

For those who might be interested in attending McGill, there is a three-week summer program that offers them an idea of what is involved in studying social work. Those who enroll follow a Bachelor's degree program tailored to their specific cultural needs. As backup, they receive a high level of personalized support from faculty and have a dedicated resource centre to use as their home base.

In another breakthrough initiative, the School has entered into a partnership with the Inuit communities of Nunavut in northern Quebec and Nunatsiavut in Labrador to develop a community-based Bachelor of Social Work degree for Inuit students. "We've received a grant from Health Canada to develop a preparatory entry program and to design an Inuit-oriented curriculum," says Thomson. "It's really exciting that we could eventually introduce a degree level program in the North."

Certification of residences lagging

Despite a February 2009 deadline, only eight percent of Quebec's 1,818 private seniors' residences have received government certification to date. Apparently they are incapable of respecting the criteria set by the government to provide quality of services and security for their residents. The problem stems from a lack of training for employees by local CSSSs which, in turn, lack personnel to train them.

Dawson seeking homework help

One of the key elements of Dawson Community Centre's children's program is help with their homework. Many come from single-parent families and need such assistance from outside the home. But with more and more youngsters requiring special attention, the Verdun-based centre needs volunteers to help its three staff monitors with the workload.

"We have 72 youngsters registered for our homework activities," explains **Heidy Wager**, coordinator of the 5-12 Program. "We try to maintain a ratio of one monitor per group of six – they each handle several a day. But the number of kids with learning disabilities, ADHD and autism has been growing steadily, and their need for extra support, and extra time, has our monitors swamped."

In light of another growing problem, the Centre has just introduced a Saturday morning literacy program for children. "There are some children with such low reading ability that they need one-on-one attention to help them into the school curriculum," says Wager. "We have hired a literacy teacher to direct this class, but monitors are needed to help out." For further information: 514 767 9967.

NOVA to open new footcare clinic

NOVA MONTREAL (formerly VON) will be opening a new special care footcare clinic in the Queen Elizabeth Complex in February. Long known for its program of home visits and community footcare clinics, NOVA has detected a need for more advanced treatment for persons experiencing complications from adverse health conditions.

"We're looking at people who are at risk," says **Marla Stovin**, executive director. "People with diabetes and a compromised circulatory system, for example, have foot problems that require much more than basic attention. Our nurse will not only address those immediate problems but will also provide guidance to clients on how to maintain foot health." For further information: 514 866 6801.

Caring for the aging volunteer

Volunteer managers from nonprofit organizations across the city gathered last month to discuss a growing mutual concern: cognitive impairment in aging volunteers. The workshop was organized by the Community Council on Volunteerism (CCV), and featured experts in law and gerontology. Key issues in the discussion were identifying the early onset of cognitive impairment and understanding its legal implications for the volunteer manager.

“It was a real eye-opener,” exclaims **Rosemary Byrne**, director of volunteer services at St. Mary’s Hospital Centre. “Older volunteers are the backbone of many of our organizations. There are lots in their 80s and 90s – one agency actually has a few 100 year-olds coming in to help. We discovered that we have a legal responsibility to intervene should any of them exhibit signs of impairment.”

This obligation stems from the Good Samaritan dictate, which requires citizens to come to the aid of someone in need. “In our case,” explains Byrne, “it means that even if we have a contract with volunteers absolving us of responsibility, we still have a legal duty to get them care and support should the need arise. That leads to the necessity of maintaining an up-to-date list of emergency contacts for anyone who works for us.”

CCV is a multi-sector network of 25 institutions and community-based organizations serving the English-speaking community of Montreal. Their combined base represents thousands of volunteers.

Social housing surge in Montreal

The Metropolitan Montreal Community is to spend \$500 million over the next five years to build, renovate and repair some 10,000 low-income and social housing units in the greater Montreal area. The Quebec government has set aside \$26 million to build 1,000 units. And the federal government has allocated \$1.9 billion to combat homelessness in Canada, some of which will be coming to this city.

Bureau working on better welcome

The Volunteer Bureau of Montreal (VBM) is aiming to provide its immigrant volunteers with more help in integrating into the volunteer sector, and into the community. “It’s one of our main priorities for the New Year,” affirms **Alison Stevens**, new executive director.

“We’re finding now that nearly two out of three of the people who walk through our door for an interview are very recent immigrants,” says Stevens. “Many have been directed to us from their French class or the immigration office as a possible source of work or as a way of integrating into the host community. In either case, we’ve not been doing the best job we can.”

In canvassing local organizations for their interest in absorbing new immigrants whose language skills might be lacking, the Bureau found a few that were keen enough to give it a try. “We’ll be giving them a more personalized service,” Stevens says. “We’ll also be giving specific training to our counsellors to work with the immigrants to determine what their needs are, and how best we can respond to them.” For further information: 514 842 3351.

Many kids not ready for school

A recent survey on school readiness among 10,000 kindergarten children in Montreal has raised some worrisome facts. Five development areas were assessed in the survey, which was conducted by the City’s Public Health Department. It found that one-third of these children were vulnerable in at least one of those vital areas. Over 5,000 of them will need special support upon entering school. While 12 percent displayed weakness in social skills, 17 percent were vulnerable in the area of cognitive and language skills and 15 percent were lacking in emotional maturity for their age.

Although average scores in Montreal were lower than the Canadian average, they were much the same as in those in Vancouver and Toronto.

Teens turning to volunteerism

A new poll of Canadian teenagers sponsored by MacKenzie Investments reveals that 84 percent volunteer at least five hours a year to charitable causes – double Canada’s total national average of 42 percent. They also donate an average of \$293 of their own money; the national average is \$400.

The top reason given for this philanthropic bent – by 59 percent of the respondents – is a desire to help their own communities. Only 32 percent say that they are giving because they need to fill school requirements.

Quebec volunteer awards available

The provincial government is calling for nominations for its annual Hommage bénévolat-Québec awards. Under the theme “Dis-lui merci”, 37 individuals and five organizations will be honoured in three categories: Jeune bénévole (between 14 and 30 years); Bénévole en action (31 and over); and Organisme en action. Winners will be announced in April 2009 during Volunteer Week. Nominations close on January 22. Candidates names may be submitted at: www.benevolat.gouv.qc.ca .

Quebecers are distinct donors

A study just published on Quebecers’ habits of volunteering and giving reveals some interesting differences from other Canadians. The Centre d’études sur l’action communautaire et bénévole extracted data pertinent to Quebec from the Statistics Canada national survey published in 2007.

The study concludes that while as many Quebecers as other Canadians donate to charities, their contributions are much lower, and less driven by religious beliefs than donors in other provinces. It notes also that employee volunteer action is much lower in Quebec companies. And that Quebecers are less likely to participate in activities organized by non-profit agencies or groups. For further information: www.mess.gouv.qc.ca/saca/ .

In brief

The following have been named members of the Montreal Regional Health and Social Services English-language advisory committee: **Marie-Josée Bonin, Dora Ceste, Janet Forsyth, Jim Gates, Colin Goldfinch, Robert Martini, Cyril Morgan, Diane Sasson, Rosemary Steinberg, Jim Tremain, Germain Tullio.**

Gaston Bouchard has been named interim president and CEO of the Foundation of Greater Montreal.

Rosemary Byrne has been named vice-president of Volunteer Canada.

Maureen McKeown, team leader of Bourbonnière Group Home, won the 2008 Manny Batshaw Award of Excellence.

Herb Shaw, dedicated employee of United Red Feather Services from 1970 to 1982, and volunteer accountant for the Red Feather Foundation until 2002, died in Toronto in October at the age of 96.

Alison Stevens has been appointed executive director of the Volunteer Bureau of Montreal.

Canada Post has introduced a permanent 52 cent stamp as a fundraiser for mental health. For each purchase of the new special booklet of ten stamps, “one dollar will be donated to the fight against mental illness”.

The Volunteer Bureau of Montreal is holding a contest for amateur videos on volunteerism in action. The winner will be used for its television advertising in 2009. For information: www.cestunconcours.com .

An information sheet on [Applying for Charitable Status](#) is available at www.coco-net.org .

The editor welcomes story ideas: 514 937 4309

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